

Economic Development: Still a Shared Responsibility

by Lily Qi, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer for Economic and Workforce Development, Montgomery County

Much has been said about the new Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (EDC), now officially open for business as the County's lead economic development organization. With its first CEO in place and a growing staff, the EDC is the primary point of contact for businesses either in Montgomery County or should be here. Among the EDC's major responsibilities is building a compelling narrative about doing business in Montgomery County to attract, retain and grow businesses and employers in order to expand our jobs and tax base.

Also created as a result of the economic development restructuring is WorkSource Montgomery, Inc. (WSM) as the County's clearinghouse and convener of all workforce development programs and resources. It works hand in hand with the EDC to meet our growing industries' talent needs.

But having the EDC and WSM in place does not mitigate the County government's responsibility in economic development. It is naive to expect the EDC and WSM to deliver magic because these organizations can only be effective if all of us – public, private and community partners pull our weight and work collaboratively to ensure Montgomery County's competitiveness for talent and businesses. The success of these partnerships depends on the greater environment in which to grow businesses and entrepreneurship such as a business-friendly climate and quality of place.

The timing could not have been better when the County Council adopted the County Executive's Comprehensive Economic Strategy in October. Developed with extensive public input, rigorous research, and national best practices, the strategic plan is a reflection of the reality that economic development takes strategic alignment of **people, place and institutions**. It is a call to action for Montgomery County and our leaders of all sectors to embrace economic vitality as a top priority and to aggressively pursue economic opportunities so that

Montgomery County can live up to our full potential as *"a global magnet for creative companies, technologies and people."*

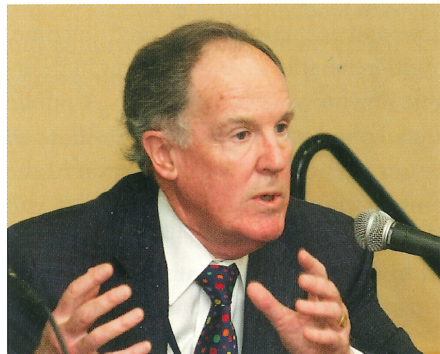
Achieving this vision takes a village. It is no coincidence that the very first strategy of the Comprehensive Economic Strategy calls for further strengthening Montgomery County's business climate and building a solution-based "culture of customer service excellence" across County departments and public agencies. To that end, the County Executive has made "improving the perception of Montgomery County's business friendliness" as an organization-wide priority within the Executive Branch. With input from business groups and over 700 responses to an online business climate survey, we have identified a range of challenges to doing business in Montgomery County. A team of business executives and county staff is working with departments to address the issues and developing tools including an integrated business portal, automating forms and streamlining processes to make it easier to interact with County government.

Another critically important element to economic development that a local government must take leadership on is advancing infrastructure and quality of place. These days, few would dispute the connection between quality of place and our ability to attract jobs, as evidenced by Marriott International's decision to relocate to amenity-rich and transit-connected downtown Bethesda,

only a few miles from its current location in a suburban office park, to meet the needs of its multi-generational workforce. This is why Montgomery County leadership has steadfastly focused on advancing public transit and transit-oriented development, building fiber connectivity and creating vibrant places for both residents and businesses. Along the metro red line, Bethesda and Silver Spring are no longer the only two anchor destinations for shopping, dining and entertainment. Places like White Flint, Twinbrook, Rockville, Shady Grove and Wheaton are shaping up as viable choices to huddle and hang out, and the new Clarksburg Premium Outlet puts UpCounty on the map as a regional destination while a growing craft brewery and distillery industry is taking roots.

From the Smart Growth Initiative that turned County-owned land into tax-generating mixed-use developments to the White Oak Science Gateway to advance biomedical innovation; from a rapid transit network along strategic corridors to direct fiber connection with Ashburn under the Potomac River; from innovation partnerships such as BioHealth Innovation and the National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence to restructuring economic development, Montgomery County has made significant and often difficult investments to expand the commercial tax base and ensure the long-term competitiveness and attractiveness to people and businesses.

With the progress we have made and a new economic development structure that ushered in direct private-sector leadership in economic development, we are well-positioned to achieve the next level of success. But economic development is a complex and long-haul game and requires each of us to do our part to make Montgomery a top-tier community for investments, jobs and talent because anything short of that should be unacceptable to one of the most fortunate and successful communities in the world.



Bob Buchanan, Chair of the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation, speaks at the 2016 AHCMC summit.